How To do a Neighborhood Plan?

In the **WELCOME** section, you learned what neighborhood planning is and how it can strengthen your neighborhood by bringing people together. Are you considering whether your neighborhood needs a plan? A neighborhood plan will be most beneficial to neighborhoods that need to address critical issues now or in the near future.

**A few of these issues could be:**
- Need for public transit service improvement
- Need for more housing price diversity
- Mismatches between zoning and actual land use
- Environmental, residential, or historical qualities of a neighborhood are threatened
Is your neighborhood ready to do a plan?

Check readiness with the following:

- Contact your District community planner to see whether there are existing neighborhood plans for your area or other types of plans that should be considered and who has been part of those planning efforts.

- Your neighborhood has formal or informal networks of organizations that have worked together in the past on some activity or social event.

- Neighbors are currently involved with other important stakeholders, such as schools, businesses or churches.

- Neighbors know each other and use formal or informal networks of communication that already exist in the neighborhood.

If there is no strong neighborhood organization to take the lead, forming a planning committee may be a good first step. You will need people who are willing to commit to many hours of volunteer time and believe in the importance of the planning effort.

Paths to Neighborhood Planning

1. Goals & Strategies Report .......................................................... Page 2
2. Neighborhood Planning Process ............................................. Page 7
If you don't have the time or resources to do a full neighborhood plan, or want to focus on a more specific project, a **Goals and Strategies Report** is a do-it-yourself approach. The Report is a quick snapshot of a community's values and focuses energy on agreed upon goals. It can help your community get organized to accomplish your goals by a certain date. It can also be a first step before doing a more comprehensive neighborhood plan.

**Goals & Strategies Reports identify:**

**GOALS**: Things your neighbors would like to happen: “Where do we want to be?”

**IMPROVEMENTS**: Things your neighbors would like to change: “Where do we want to go?”

**STRATEGY ACTIONS**: Things the community can do to start achieving the goals: “How do we get from today to where we want to be?”

**Creating a Goals & Strategies Report:**

1. Recruit a Planning Team
2. First Neighborhood Workshop
3. Writing the Report
4. Second Neighborhood Workshop
5. Revise Report and Distribute
6. Implement Action Steps

**6 STEPS**

**Step 1: Recruit a Planning Team**

The Planning Team is responsible for organizing outreach and writing the Goals & Strategies Report. The members of the team will:

- Write public meeting agendas
- Find and reserve meeting locations / determine methods of outreach & engagement
- Prepare materials for meetings
- Publicize the meetings and communicate to stakeholders
- Collect and analyze zoning and land use maps (ask your District Planner)
- Collect and analyze data & information
- Add public feedback into the plan

The team will assemble the following materials:

- Relevant demographic and land use data within the boundaries of the neighborhood (ask your District Planner)
- Gather images of existing conditions in the neighborhood—either as photographs or video—to help workshop attendees recall the area's physical strengths and problems.

**Some tips for organizing a diverse and inclusive planning team are:**

- Recruit members who geographically represent the entire neighborhood.
- Contact area leaders who have flexible work schedules or are retired.
- Contact college students with special skills.
- Contact board members of long-time local organizations or long-time residents with knowledge of the neighborhood
- Put out a general call. There may be people new to the neighborhood or people who are ready to get involved who are interested.
- Limit the size to be small enough to be manageable—10-15 members usually works best.
- Contact businesses willing to donate services or meeting space.
First actions for the planning team:
- Write down how they will work together, assign roles and responsibilities; (everyone should share their strengths and what they bring to the group, what they are willing to commit to.)
- Write down the goals of the team.
- Determine if outside help is needed in facilitating the workshops or in writing the report.
- Set a preliminary schedule- set dates and announce them.
- Prepare checklists for planning each workshop.

**Step 2: First Neighborhood Workshop**
*The workshop steps in this section are geared to “live” meetings. The process and structure can be adapted for virtual meetings or other online methods.*

**Welcome & Introductions**
- Have people sign-in when they enter so you can follow-up with them.
- Welcome participants and introduce the planning team.
- Define what a Goals & Strategies Report is and why you’re doing one
- Show the boundaries of the neighborhood using a neighborhood map.
- Talk about the demographic and land use information you have collected so everyone is on the same page about the facts (also post on website or other online location)

**Talk about the Exercise**
- Explain that you will break into smaller groups to discuss neighborhood strengths, problems, opportunities and threats (SPOT’s) as well as goals and strategies.
- Explain what SPOT (or SWOT) analysis is. (see “Gathering Information About Your Neighborhood”)

**Breakout Groups Round 1**
- Break into groups by numbering off, assigning table numbers at sign-in, or other method. This avoids people grouping by couples or friend groups.
- Each breakout group should have two facilitators, one to guide the discussion and one to take notes on the flip chart and map.
- Review the “ground rules” for small groups (see “how do we work together?”) and ask everyone at the table to agree to follow these guidelines.
- Ask the table what they consider Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats in the neighborhood, and mark them on the map.
- Facilitators should make sure participants address more than just “problems” and “threats”.
- People often tend to focus on the negative without recognizing the positive.
- Then each table should choose the 3-5 issues most important to the group and write them on the flip chart.

**Put all the issues together as a big group**
- Return from the breakout groups to the larger group.
- Each group presents their findings on the flip sheets and map.
- After all groups present, everyone discusses to come up with a list 4-5 priority issues for the whole group. Some issues on similar topics can be combined into one.
- Your planning team can decide to recruit an unbiased outside facilitator help get group consensus.

**Breakout Groups Round 2**
- Each group brainstorms goals based on the 4-5 priority issues.
- A goal is a clear, concise, realistic statement about what the neighborhood wants to accomplish.
- The table facilitator will record the group’s goal for each issue.
- Then the group will identify at least 3-4 strategies to achieve each goal. (see Section 2 for examples of goals and strategies.)
Put all the goals & strategies together as a big group
- Return from the breakout groups to the larger group
- Each group presents their main findings.
- Give each participant three sticker dots
- Post each group’s lists on the wall
- Have everyone place sticker dots next to the goals they think are the most important.
- The goals with the most dots will be the priority goals.

Wrap Up and Next Steps
- Thank everyone for their participation and their dedication to their neighborhood.
- Ask if any attendees are interested in helping write the report and mark their names on the sign-in sheet.

NOTE: Depending on participants and diversity stakeholders, you may need to hold more than one workshop to get to this point! This is a LOT of work for one session.

Step 3: Writing the Report
The Planning Team can write the report or decide to hire a professional to help write and design it so it’s visually appealing and easy-to-read. Here is one format you can use for the report:

Cover Sheet
- Title and Date
- Name of your neighborhood or organization and names of report authors
- The fact that the report is based on ideas from a public workshop(s) and date(s).
- Can also include a map or photos from the workshop on the cover.

Acknowledgements
- Give credit to all the organizers and volunteers who helped with the workshop and report.
- Provide contact information in case someone has questions about the report.

Table of Contents
- Include section titles and page numbers

Neighborhood Issues from SWOT / SPOT exercise
- Include the issues identified from this exercise, including common themes from different tables.

Priority Goals & Strategies
- List of the priority goals identified at the workshop.
- Include the strategies to achieve each goal underneath it.
- Remember that a goal is the “WHAT” or “WHY”. The strategy is the “HOW”.
- For example, “Request a Streets Department traffic study” is a strategy for a goal of “Improve pedestrian safety”.

Other Goals & Strategies
- List the other goals and strategies that were not priority goals.

Appendix
- Research that was presented at workshop on demographics and land use
- Public workshop agenda and number of people who attended
- Existing condition photographs
- Scans or photos of completed SPOT maps from workshop
- One master neighborhood map with all the strengths, problems, opportunities, and threats marked on it.
**Step 4: Second Workshop**

The purpose of this meeting is to present and refine the draft of the Goals & Strategies report. It is also a chance to provide feedback for people who could not attend the first workshop.

**Before the workshop:**
- Give people a chance to read the draft ahead of time.
- Put copies of the draft report places people can read it (libraries, neighborhood organization offices, etc.)
- Put the draft online and publicize it

**At the beginning of the workshop:**
- Welcome, sign-in sheets
- Background on Work Progress
- Review of the Report

**Breakout Groups:**
- Break into groups by numbering off or other method.
- Each breakout group should have two facilitators, one to guide the discussion and one to take notes on the flip chart.
- Reflect on whether the draft captures what happened at the first workshop and people’s opinions who weren’t at the first workshop
- Talk about Action Steps for specific strategies or recommendations. The Action Steps break each strategy into “do-able” actions.
- Each action step should be S.M.A.R.T.: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed. (See Action Plan in the box).

**Return to the big group to discuss:**
- Each breakout reports out to the collective group
- Wrap-up & Next Steps

**Step 5: Edit Report & Distribute**
- Planning Team edits the draft Goals & Strategies Report based on the comments from the second public workshop.
- Create Action Steps using the ones identified during the second workshop.
- Give each action step should have a deadline, a responsible party for doing the action, and a list of resources needed.
- Edit and format report. Ask someone from outside your Team to proofread the report, checking for errors and readability.
- Make the final Report available on-line and/or print out hard copies and distribute to all participants, organizations, business associations, libraries, Councilperson’s office, and other stakeholders.
- If you have been working with a district planner at the City Planning Commission, he/she will be able to assist you with distributing copies to all relevant city departments.

**Step 6: Implement Action Steps**
- Take action!
- Meet regularly to check on progress of completing action steps
- Recognize everyone’s efforts.
- Celebrate your successes!
2 Neighborhood Planning Process

The Goals & Strategies Report could be the end of your neighborhood’s planning effort, or it could be a bridge to a larger and more inclusive planning process. Your district planner can provide guidance. The following steps represent one way your community could build a neighborhood planning effort. Another possibility is that a sponsoring organization such as a community development corporation, or CDC, would manage the process and retain the services of paid consultants with expertise in neighborhood planning. Partnering with other established organizations may give you a competitive advantage in obtaining planning grants.

Overview of Steps:
The process outlined below, and the plan elements identified, are one way a neighborhood could manage a do-it-yourself campaign. This outline assumes that there has been NO prior planning effort, such as the Goals & Strategies Report, previously described.

8 STEPS

Step 1: Recruit the Planning Team
As in the Goals & Strategies Report, the first step is to recruit a team that is representative of the geographic area of the plan. Getting many different stakeholder groups involved is key to the success of a planning effort. In addition to the tasks listed for the Goals & Strategies Report team, the Planning Team should:
- Contact the district planner from the Planning Commission assigned to your area for guidance.
- Develop a structure for getting work done that is acceptable to everyone and create a work schedule.
- Determine what outside expertise may be needed.
- Identify plan boundaries and determine what organizations/institutions/agencies, etc. should be included in the process.
- Discuss the diverse ways you could engage with all stakeholders to get their ideas and input during the planning process.

Step 2: Announce Your Intention
Getting neighbors excited and enthusiastic about improving the area is important to encourage participation. This sets the stage for the next step of gathering information. Getting the word out may take the form of a press release, a website announcement, using social media, and/or a live kick-off event that includes food!

Step 3: Learn About Your Neighborhood
This step involves collecting and analyzing basic neighborhood information, including land use and demographic data about your neighborhood. It’s helpful to show comparisons between your area and the city overall. Your team’s perceptions about the area may change as you gather more data and talk to more people.

A major difference between the Goals & Strategies Report and the Neighborhood Plan is the level of detail and base data the plan includes. For DIY planning, the team will ask for volunteers to serve on a work group or technical committee to distribute the load and use expertise already in the community. (see Gathering Information)
Step 4: Community Engagement (throughout)
Consider how your team will be able to manage input and collect ideas from the community and identify key points in the timeline to gather these. Gone are the days of relying solely on live evening public meetings which tend to attract the same people. Your team should think about all the different stakeholder groups and what methods of engagement are best for them. Your aim is to make gathering input as accessible, attractive, (and fun!) as possible.
See the tool on “Community Engagement” for ideas such as an open house, community surveys, posting interactive “voting” sheets in public places and online, ‘walkshops’, visioning exercises, design charrettes, focus groups and interviews.

Step 5: Analysis
This step can be a separate chapter in the final plan. All the information gathered about existing conditions, history, demographics, social and cultural assets are studied to find meaningful conclusions and direction. Analysis can be done in different ways—such as by issues and trends, opportunities and constraints, alternative scenarios, and market analysis.
Analysis should also consider the work of previous plans, recent investments and, of course, the findings of community engagement efforts.

Step 6: Develop Strategies
This step uses the findings of the work groups to map out goals, with the associated strategies and action steps to achieve each one. These can be organized in a way that aligns with the “analysis” chapter. For each goal’s strategy, the plan should identify responsible parties, funding sources, estimated costs and a timeframe.
Some of the common types of recommendations are about land use, zoning, design guidelines, historic designations, improvement of community facilities and city infrastructure, and projects by community volunteers.

Step 7: Publicize Final Draft
The final draft can be posted online to collect feedback and also make use of an open house format. Get the draft out to participants in the process and the widest audience possible in the community. Begin to organize a community action group that will work to move the plan recommendations toward implementation.

Step 8: Implementation & Celebration
Incorporate feedback and distribute the final plan to implementers. The plan, once completed, becomes the primary implementation tool for your neighborhood. It lays out what the community wants to be done, when and by whom. Celebrate your completion of the plan! The team and other assigned volunteers should set up a regular schedule to look at indicators and other measurements of progress and have a plan for sharing this to the wider community. Celebrate incremental progress as you go!

What’s Included in a Plan?
To summarize, the bullets below represent the typical components of a neighborhood plan. It may be helpful to look at neighborhood plans from other areas to see what kind of structure works best for your neighborhood.
- Front-End: (see Goals & Strategies Report)
- Plan Overview
- Existing Conditions
  • Neighborhood Identity
  • Community Connections
  • Community Places and Open Spaces
- Analysis
- Summary and Goals & Strategies (recommendations)
- Implementation